

Title of Research Project: Exploring the Impact of LEARN: A Case study of an Experiential Learning Programme in One School in the Mid-West of Ireland

Researchers: Dr Orla McCormack, Brian O' Donoghue, Dr Raymond Lynch, Catherine O'Donnell, Dr Jennifer Hennessy and Vivien Grogan



Contact Details: Orla.mccormack@ul.ie Raymond.lynch@ul.ie Jennifer.hennessy@ul.ie
Brian.odonoghue@enniscc.ie

Relevant key words: Experiential Learning; Community; Field Trips; Student Engagement and Motivation

Summary:

LEARN is an experiential learning programme offered to all second level students within the school. The programme aims to link curriculum and classroom-based learning to the local context. As part of the experience, students partake in a range of trips in the local community. Pre and post-teaching aim to support students to link the experience to specific subjects.

This study sought to explore the impact of LEARN on students (and teachers) as well as identify any supports and constraints that influenced the provision of the programme. A mixed methods approach was adopted, with focus groups being conducted with a sample of second-year students at two timepoints, as well as focus group/interviews with five staff members. A 15-item questionnaire, exploring students' sense of motivation, engagement and connectedness with the community, was administered at three time points throughout one academic year.

The study found that students viewed LEARN from a social and personal wellbeing perspective and welcomed the opportunity it provided to step away from the academic stresses and pressures of school life. They did not believe that LEARN impacted on their academic achievement. LEARN appeared to have a positive impact on teacher-student relationships. Questionnaire data (Timepoint 1) portrayed a high level of agreement regarding students sense of motivation, engagement and connectedness with the community.

Questions emerged regarding the extent to which the LEARN experience was fully embedded into teaching and learning. Emphasis and priority appeared to be placed on 'the trip', with different teachers appearing to adopt differing approaches to the pre and post-teaching dimensions of LEARN. The level of communication with parents was identified as an area for potential improvement.

Published: May 2020